

Judith Shapiro, *China's Environmental Challenges*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012, 205 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-6091-2 (paperback).

In her newest book, *China's Environmental Challenges*, Professor Judith Shapiro addresses China's pressing environmental challenges in a global perspective and discusses what is at stake for the future. It is a well-researched book, solidly grounded in Shapiro's deep knowledge of past and current – mainly political and legal – developments in China related to the challenges of achieving sustainable development. Shapiro writes with ease, making the book immensely readable and well suited as a core part of the curriculum in introducing undergraduate students, for example, to the environmental impact of China's rise. It works especially well as a textbook, as each chapter concludes with questions for research and discussion as well as a short list of additional readings. The book may also be useful for students of sociology, anthropology, political science or human geography and is a welcome addition to the literature about sustainable development in China and the impacts of China's rise on the natural environment. The book is timely, on a very relevant topic and may be useful for other academic fields besides those directly concerned with China. With its excellent overview, it will no doubt also be a good place to start for readers outside of academia who are interested in China, its environment and interaction with the rest of the world.

Shapiro starts out by introducing the environmental challenges facing China, putting them into perspective and highlighting one of the main points of the book, that 'China's problems are interconnected with those of the rest of the planet' (p. 2). The introduction gives brief overviews of the five chosen analytical concepts forming the backbone of the book: *globalization*, *governance*, *national identity*, *civil society* and *environmental justice*. These are well chosen analytical concepts and as the book progresses, Shapiro clearly demonstrates her thorough knowledge of China and sustainable development by also drawing on extensive personal experience from her study of China's environment.

The first analytical concept, *globalization*, is the core theme of the second chapter. Shapiro begins with the big picture and deals with drivers and trends of environmental challenges in China: the rise of the middle class, urbanization, land use changes, population increase, climate change and environmental conflicts. These are well-known drivers of environmental challenges, not just in China. Shapiro keeps a firm grip on the complexity of the issues and each driver and challenge seems

well chosen, being grounded in environmental events in China during the last decade.

Governance and 'the view from above' (p. 57) is the theme of the third chapter, which hones in on the 'processes, policies, laws and institutions that affect social relations and guide attitudes and public behavior' (p. 19). Here Shapiro highlights the classic weak enforcement problems pervasive in the Chinese system but goes one step further to explain the less well-known – at least to the broader public – but increasingly important fragmentation of the Chinese political system and shows how this fragmentation feeds into the escalating Chinese environmental crises.

Chapter four is devoted to *national identity*. Here Shapiro links 'the Chinese people's struggle to define their national identity' (p. 19) and the prospects for achieving sustainable development in China. Although, on the surface, national identity seems unrelated to environmental challenges, Shapiro effortlessly shows how these issues are interrelated, and how important national identity has been and will be if China wishes to achieve the goal of 'becoming a leader of truly sustainable development' (p. 101).

Shapiro's fourth analytical concept is *civil society*, the 'view from below' (p. 103) or 'the space in society that exists between the level of the individual and the state' (p. 20). Chapter five highlights some of the challenges and the main events in the rise of the environmental movement in China through descriptions of different types of civil society organizations and their relationship to the state. A large part of the chapter is devoted to discussing different strategies employed by civil society organizations and the role they play in Chinese society today.

The last analytical concept discussed by Shapiro is *environmental justice* or the displacement of environmental harm. In chapter six the point is made that environmental justice and the displacement of environmental harm happens between more developed countries and China (such as exporting toxic electronic waste to China), within China (from the developed eastern seaboard to the interior and less developed western parts of China), as well as from China to less developed countries. This chapter discusses China's environmental challenges in a global perspective and makes the point that environmental harm is often inflicted on the poorest and least developed parts of China – and indeed the world. The chapter (and in some way the whole book) also seem to have the explicit point of making readers think critically about their own role in exporting environmental harm.

In the final chapter of the book, Shapiro sums up, proposes prospects for the future, and makes clear that all the analytical themes employed in the previous chapters are closely interconnected. Concluding, Shapiro makes the final point that, 'Many of the challenges described in this book are for the Chinese people to solve' (p. 165). For sustainable development to be achieved in China, the country needs knowledge and expertise from developed countries but ultimately also needs to solve the significant internal problems in its own way. Shapiro's point is that there is no easy fix but that all the pieces are there to solve the puzzle; but it will take collective effort – domestic and international alike.

Shapiro's book is an excellent textbook, which I would recommend to any reader interested in a well-written and balanced account of the toll rapid economic growth has taken on China's environment. It is also an important lesson (and a good place to start) for anyone interested in China who might still hold the perception that the country is just a pot of gold. Gold comes at a price and *China's Environmental Challenges* serves as an excellent and well-informed reminder.

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